

# SHARP BROS. SEED CO.

101 E. 4th Street Road  
Greeley, CO 80631  
970-356-4710  
Buffalo.GXY@SharpSeed.com

P.O. Box 140  
Healy, KS 67850  
620-398-2231  
Buffalo@SharpSeed.com



## Labor Day is benchmark to plant cool season lawns

By Charles Marr

Labor Day is a magical day in horticultural activities since it starts the ideal time to establish a cool season lawn. Cool season lawn grasses go dormant in intense summer heat but begin to start growth with the onset of cooler weather and rainfall that usually begins to develop in early September over much of the central High Plains. This is an ideal time to establish a new lawn or renovate (or overseed) an established lawn to thicken the stand or to fill in some blank spots here and there.

The intense late summer heat has caused some damage in many lawns in our region. The first step in determining whether to overseed or not is to evaluate the stand of grass you have. If you have less than a 50 percent stand of grass it is probably best to start over. Till the soil over the entire lawn and start as if you are starting a new lawn from scratch. If you have more than a 50 percent stand then it may be best to consider overseeding. Overseeding is simply adding additional seed to thicken the stand--all over or in selected locations--by loosening the soil surface without excessively damaging the established grass. There will, obviously, be some damage to the grass that is already there but you can do it in such a way to keep damage at a minimum. We do, however, have to loosen the soil surface so that seed can get covered with soil in the process.

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You will find that grass seed germinates very rapidly in the warm summer conditions. You can either water the grass to start the germination process or wait for Mother Nature to provide some rainfall. It might be a good idea to wait until a rain since the cooler conditions following a rain will mean that you may not have to provide daily watering until the grass has established itself well enough to survive. After about a week of daily watering after germination you can reduce watering from once a day to once every several days. After about another week you should be able to rely on nature to take it from there.

Getting your lawn germinated in early September means that you can control weeds with an application of herbicides in mid-October to take care of dandelions and other weeds which can be a problem in next spring's lawn. About a month after germination you can safely apply these broadleaf weed control materials without damaging the grass. For crabgrass, wait until next spring to apply your grassy weed control measures.

So, despite the intense summer heat it is time to overseed a lawn. Labor Day doesn't mean that you get a holiday--you'll be too busy working on your lawn.

*Charles Marr is the Horticulture State Leader for K-State Cooperative Extension. He received his PhD from the University of Tennessee.*